

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Buried Telecommunications Line, Sheridan County

Proposed Implementation Date: Summer 2012

Proponent: Nemont Telephone Cooperative, PO Box 600, Scobey, MT 59623-0600

Type and Purpose of Action: Nemont Telephone Cooperative has submitted 23 Right of Way Easement Applications to install buried telecommunication lines on/across State land in Sheridan County. The proposed ROWs would include 32.759 acres across 23 tracts of State land (22.369 acres of grazing land and 10.39 acres of agricultural land). Nemont has obtained signed Settlement of Damages forms for all 23 tracts and agree to pay lessees for all "actual damages" resulting from the installation of the lines. Using the DNRC's "County Fee Schedule for Sheridan County", Nemont would be responsible for paying \$23,450.80 to the Trust as compensation for the acreage involved in the easements.

Location: Sec. 2 of T34N - R51E; Sec. 9 and Sec. 36 of T34N - R52E; Sec. 16 of T34N - R53E; Sec. 16 and Sec. 36 of T35N - R52E; Sec. 36 of T35N - R53E; Sec. 16 of T35N - R54E; Sec. 21 and Sec. 28 of T35N - R55E; Sec. 15, Sec. 16, Sec. 29 and Sec. 32 of T36N - R52E; Sec. 3, Sec. 10, Sec. 16, Sec. 24, Sec. 25, and Sec. 36 of T36N - R54E; Sec. 23 of T37N - R51E; Sec. 15 and Sec. 16 of T37N - R52E.

County: Sheridan

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

The applicant has submitted Right of Way Applications to the DNRC-Glasgow Unit Office along with the survey plats for each state tract that would be crossed. The purpose of the requests is to install new buried telecommunications lines. Nemont has worked to create a plan allowing the majority of new lines to be placed in a close proximity to existing county road ROWs. They also plan to place pedestals on the edges of fields as to not interfere with the other surface activities. The surface lessee's have been contacted by Nemont Telephone Cooperative in order to settle for surface damages. Ethnoscience Inc. was contracted to conduct an Archaeological study along the proposed routes. A copy of their findings was submitted to the Glasgow Unit Office.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

NRCS-3/10 permits may be required. According to Nemont personnel, Heberly and Associates is aware of the regulations/requirements regarding these permits and they would be responsible for obtaining these permits.

Farm Service Agency- Nemont must obtain permission to cross and/or disturb State lands enrolled in the CRP program. GUO personnel did not identify any acreage enrolled in CRP during the review process.

Government agencies holding land within the project area would be involved if their land holdings are planned to be utilized.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Action Alternative: Grant Right of Way Easements to Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on the listed State owned tracts.

	No Action Alternative: Deny the Right of Way Easements requested by Nemont Telephone Cooperative to place new buried telecommunications lines on State owned tracts.
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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS
	<p>N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)</p>
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:</p> <p>Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>A total of 32.759 acres of State land is included in the 23 ROW easement applications. There are no fragile, compactable, or unstable soils present or any unusual geologic features. The installation of the buried telecommunications lines would be completed using a static plow and a directional boring machine to install the lines under roads and waterways. Nemont would be responsible for all reclamation if project proceeds.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to the soils would be temporary and soils are anticipated to return to normal. No impacts to fragile, compactable, or unstable soils or any unusual geologic features are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics would occur.</p>
<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>The project area does not contain any significant surface or groundwater resources.</p> <p>Action: Impacts to water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface and ground water are not anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>
<p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?</p>	<p>The project area is not located in an air quality regulation zone or airshed.</p> <p>Action: The air quality may or may not be temporarily reduced during installation. Small amounts of pollutants from machinery and particulates from the disturbance of the areas soil may be produced. The possible reduction in air quality would be minimal and would quickly return to normal by natural means.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality would occur.</p>
<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered?</p>	<p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 11 plant "species of concern" for all of Sheridan County. No rare plants or cover types are known to exist within</p>

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Are any rare plants or cover types present?	<p>the project area.</p> <p>Action: Temporary disturbances to plant communities located within the proposed project area would occur. Vegetative communities would not be permanently altered. No impacts to rare plants or cover types are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality would occur.</p>
8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	<p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 39 animal "species of concern" and 13 "potential species of concern" for all of Sheridan County. Project area is mostly located along county and/or private roads and none of the listed species are known to substantially use the habitats located within the project area.</p> <p>Action: Habitats would be temporarily disturbed during installation of the lines. No lasting impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and/or habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats would occur.</p>
9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?	<p>The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 11 plant "species of concern", 39 animal "species of concern", and 13 animal "potential species of concern" for all of Sheridan County. The proposed area is mostly located along county and/or private roads.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>
10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	<p>Ethnoscience Inc. completed a cultural and paleontological resources inventory for the areas of potential effect on the state tracts impacted with installation of NEMONT's proposed, buried telecommunications line. They identified six sites, an isolated find, and an unusual clustering of rocks. They recommended avoidance of these sites by re-routing the line s around the identified sites. DNRC would stipulate this recommendation as a condition of granting the ROW easements. Nemont is aware of the recommendation and agreed to avoid all identified sites. A copy of Ethnoscience's findings was submitted to both Nemont and the Glasgow Unit Office.</p> <p>Action: Since Nemont would be required to avoid the areas surrounding the identified sites, no impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.</p>

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11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	<p>The project area is primarily located next to county and/or private roads. The landscape consists of gently rolling hills and plains being used primarily for general farming and/or ranching operations.. The lines would be buried and the access pedestals are small enough to not interfere with the areas aesthetics. Increases of noise would occur during construction; these impacts would cease as soon as the project is completed.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.</p>
12.DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>The area does not contain limited resources. Nearby activities consist mostly of general farming and/or ranching operations.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources would occur.</p>
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects pertinent to this area are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated to occur.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>The proposed project would create human health and/or safety risks associated with the installation and maintenance of the communications line.</p> <p>Action: The employer and employee identify the risks associated with the installation of the line as an occupational hazard. The risk would only be present during installation and maintenance of the proposed line.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks would occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>Nearby activities consist primarily of general farming and/or ranching operations. Commercial and industrial activities are increasing within the project area as a result of the Bakken oil field boom expanding westward.</p> <p>Action: The surface owner and/or lessee may</p>

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	<p>experience damages in the form of temporarily decreased revenues/use of the State land due to surface disturbances from the proposed action. The decrease in revenues would be mitigated by compensation received from Nemont Telephone Cooperative to the surface owner/lessee through the Settlement of Surface Damages Form.</p> <p>No Action: No action would reduce future potentials for industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities in the area.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>The project would be completed in a relatively short time frame and it would not create permanent jobs; however, it is likely temporary jobs would be available during the installation of the line.</p> <p>Action: No lasting impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would occur.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action: The granting of the ROW easements for the project would increase the county tax base by adding infrastructure.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the state tax base and/or tax revenues would occur.</p>
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	<p>Typically, the project area receives minimal traffic during most of the year due to low population levels in northeast Montana. Slight increases in traffic occur during time periods of increased ranching and farming activities. However, the area is currently being subjected to the Bakken oil field boom and traffic levels are steadily increasing.</p> <p>Action: Increases in traffic levels would occur during installation of the line. The increased traffic would not occur at a substantial level. No impacts to government services are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the level of demand for road use or government services would occur.</p>
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	<p>There are no known zoning or management plans in affect in the construction areas.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals are anticipated occur as the construction is in remote areas.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to local environmental plans and goals would occur.</p>
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through	<p>Several of the tracts of State land are legally accessible and provide recreational opportunities. No wilderness areas are located within a close proximity</p>

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<p>this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p>to the proposed project area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to recreational quality or recreational opportunities are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the quality of recreational and wilderness activities would occur.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>Action: The service provided by the new telecommunications line may or may not increase the likelihood of future rural development in this area. No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the density and/or distribution of population and housing would occur.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts social structures, native/traditional lifestyles, or communities would occur.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity are anticipated to occur.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas cultural uniqueness and/or diversity would occur.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>Action: The State trust would receive \$23,450.80 as compensation for granting 23 ROW easements to Nemont. Residents within the project area would benefit from the ability to obtain high speed internet from Nemont.</p> <p>No Action: The State trust would not receive \$23,450.80 as compensation for granting 23 ROW easements to Nemont. No impacts to the social and economic circumstances would occur.</p>

EA Checklist Prepared By: /s/
Matthew Poole (Land Use Specialist)

 Date: July 3, 2012

IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Proceed with Action Alternative as no significant impacts have been identified.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Impacts are mitigated to a reasonable level.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: R. Hoyt Richards Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

 /s/
Signature

 Date: July 3, 2012

